



National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Gateway National Recreation Area

*Gateway State of the Park 2006*



# *Introduction: Gateway NRA*



Dawn light captures the flight of a heron against a horizon of skyscrapers and warms massive gray walls that once protected the nation's great city of commerce; a large extended family of newly arrived immigrants picnic between dips in cool ocean waters while a hiker explores trails through a marine forest and a boater sets sail with a crew of inner city kids—this is Gateway National Recreation Area, one of America's preeminent National Parks.

Like every national park, Gateway is a special place where visitors can experience the heritage of the United States on a first hand basis. Like every other national park, Gateway is managed to protect the unique natural and cultural resources that make it a special place.

What makes this National Park different is that Gateway is readily accessible to 16 million people who live in the metropolitan area. Gateway was created to bring the "National Park Service Experience" to these people, many who will never have the opportunity to travel outside the region. Gateway is not the only National Park in or around New York Harbor nor is it the best known, but at more than 26,000 acres it is by far the largest park in the area, it services the largest number of park visitors, and it contains the most diverse array of natural and cultural features.

Gateway National Recreation Area fills a unique niche as a representative of the National Park System in the nation's most populous urban area. The challenges are great; the opportunities many.

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*Cover: Restoration of Elder's Point Saltmarsh in Jamaica Bay  
Photo: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers*



This report is part of our effort to showcase the natural, cultural and recreational resources of Gateway National Recreation Area and all the contributing efforts of the staff, our volunteers, our friends and our partners. The accomplishments of the park this past year are impressive, and they reflect the diversity of resources that make up the park itself. One only needs to look at three of our significant accomplishments this year to realize this: the celebration of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Floyd Bennett Field, the completion of the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge Visitor Contact Station, and the opening of Aviator Sports and Recreation, a world-class sports facility operated as a park concession. These accomplishments highlight the significance and diversity of the park in the areas of cultural education, environmental education and design, and recreation.

While Gateway is a showcase for the National Park System in New York and New Jersey, we must rededicate ourselves to use that showcase as a means to reach our future leaders. The range of our programs reflects our commitment to reach the diversity of our visitors, with stewardship and education joining recreation as Gateway's three primary park programs. Each program area brings together park staff, park partners and our visitors in a variety of activities centered on park resources. Stewardship, for example, is focused on preservation of the park's many historic

structures and artifacts as well as conservation of natural areas. All National Parks afford people an opportunity to experience their heritage; at Gateway the public is encouraged to help care for that heritage.

The educational program at Gateway includes traditional ranger-led interpretive talks, exhibits and curriculum-based learning experiences. In all cases, these activities foster a better understanding of special park features; they help people connect emotionally and intellectually with their heritage.

Established on October 27, 1972 Gateway National Recreation Area is a relatively young park that is still in the process of reaching its intended potential. Beginning in 2004, the Gateway senior management team adopted five primary goals that have been used to set priorities and guide activity in all areas of park operations; the narrative of this year's accomplishments are centered around these goals. Collectively, these benchmarks are both a measure of success and evidence of a commitment to continual improvement.

Finally I wish to thank the staff and our partners who have worked so hard to serve the 9.7 million visitors who came to Gateway this past year. Faced with significant challenges, you remain steadfast in your dedication to build a National Park that is the pride of the New York metropolitan area

*Barry T. Sullivan*  
General Superintendent

*Foreword*

# Primary Goals

## GOAL 1: REVERSE DETERIORATION OF ALL PRIMARY PARK RESOURCES

### Preservation and Adaptive Reuse of Historic Hangars at Floyd Bennett Field



The use of historic hangars on Floyd Bennett Field as a recreation or sports complex has been an objective of the National Park Service for more than two decades. The 1979 General Management Plan and 1983 Development Concept Plan (DCP) both envisioned active recreation as primary activities

for Hangar Row. The DCP recommended that preservation and use of the hangars be managed through concession agreements or leases with the private sector in order "... to provide for additional recreational programs while generating enough revenue not only to support the structure's rehabilitation, operation and maintenance, but also to return some money to the NPS to help fund other preservation work on Hangar Row." In the fall of 2006 the new \$38 million concession, *Aviator Sports and Recreation*, opened its doors to the public.

### Rehabilitation of Sandy Hook Lighthouse Keepers Quarters

A five year, \$600,000 project by the Sandy Hook Foundation (SHF) to rehabilitate the Sandy Hook Lighthouse Keepers Quarters was completed with a dedication of the National Historic Landmark building on Sandy Hook Lighthouse Day. The 1883 Keepers Quarters is now home to the SHF and the New Jersey Lighthouse Society (NJLS), a volunteer group who conducts tours of the lighthouse. The building also serves as a visitor contact station for the lighthouse and contains exhibits on New Jersey lighthouses that were



developed jointly by the SHF, the NJLS and the NPS. The park served as project director for the rehabilitation, with much of the work performed by park maintenance staff.

### Repair to Battery Weed Seawall

Battery Weed in Fort Wadsworth occupies a strategic site at the Narrows where it guarded the entrance to New York Harbor for two centuries. It is considered one of the most historic batteries on the Eastern seaboard. The seawall that protects this important structure is badly deteriorated due to many years of wave action. This year the park began to stabilize the seawall and the adjacent historic dock. Dislodged stones were reset and eroded areas were backfilled. The repair will provide temporary protection until a comprehensive rebuilding of the seawall takes place. In addition, an archeological investigation of the site was performed to help guide the park in planning future phases of the project.



## Historic Structures Report completed for Fort Hancock Officers Club



A Historic Structures Report on Fort Hancock's oldest and most complex building has been completed. The Officers Club was built in 1874 as Officers Quarters for the U.S. Army Sandy Hook Proving Ground and later served as the Officers Club for Fort Hancock. Long vacant, it is among the 36 buildings leased to Sandy Hook Partners for rehabilitation. The report was written by the NPS Historic Architecture Program with review and assistance by Sandy Hook interpretive and cultural resource staff. It will be used as rehabilitation plans for the building are developed.

## Jamaica Bay Restoration



A multi-agency effort is underway to restore 60 acres of marshland in Jamaica Bay where an estimated 50 acres disappear on an annual basis. Extensive progress has been made on the restoration of Elder's Point (East) Saltmarsh in Jamaica Bay. With sand placement now complete, the majority of the 60-acre new marsh surface has been planted with saltmarsh cordgrass (*Spartina alterniflora*). A mixture of salt hay (*Spartina patens*), spike grass (*Distichlis spicata*), and saltmarsh cordgrass have been planted in

lower elevations at the site. Over 700,000 plants have been successfully established. The project is approximately 95 percent complete.

The National Park Service, in cooperation with its partners (the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, the New York City Department of Environmental Protection, and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey,) developed a 5-year monitoring and adaptive management plan to assess the progress of the overall restoration. In addition to the expected benefits to the Jamaica Bay ecosystem restoration effort, this monitoring will generate significant data for use in future projects.

## Threatened and Endangered Species Management

Work continues on an updated Threatened and Endangered Species Management plan for the Sandy Hook Unit to include all federal and state listed species that utilize the ocean and bayside beaches. A survey conducted in mid-August found 4,693 plants on Sandy Hook beaches, including a steady increase in the presence of Seabeach Amaranth.

Sandy Hook's beaches provided habitat for 22 pairs of piping plover this season. The productivity level was 1.32 chicks per pair, exceeding the 2005 rate. In order to sustain the population a rate of 1.25 is needed.



## Fort Hancock Rehabilitation and Adaptive Use

The park has made great strides toward achieving a 27 year goal of preserving through rehabilitation and adaptive use the significant buildings that make up the Fort Hancock National Historic Landmark District. After a lengthy and comprehensive process to select future lessees the NPS entered into a long-term lease with Sandy Hook Partners LLC for 36 of the 100 buildings that comprise the district. The project will build upon the current marine science education and research programs of the park to provide expanded education, conference and meeting facilities and office space. Lodging and food services will be established to support the enhanced activities.

In December 2004 the lease was challenged in Federal District Court on allegations that it would commercialize a National Park and limit public access to recreation resources. After nearly two years of litigation a Federal District Court dismissed the lawsuit on the grounds that the plaintiffs had not specified how they would be harmed by the preservation and reuse of the historic buildings.

Sandy Hook Partners has announced a financing plan provided by a New Jersey based financial partnership. These two major accomplishments move the dream of a revitalized Fort Hancock much closer to reality.





## GOAL 2: PROVIDE BASIC CONDITIONS NECESSARY FOR SAFE AND ENJOYABLE PARK VISITS

### Opening of a New Segment of a Multi-Use Pathway

Visitors, both young and old, mixed with political representatives and park officials to officially open the Rockaway Gateway Greenway (RGG), section IIA in July. The ceremony completed years of work by park officials, advocates, and interest groups who sought to define the value of park resources along this section of the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge. The pathway provides one and a half miles of safe passage exclusively for hikers, bikers, birdwatchers, rollerbladers and mobility impaired visitors. Just yards from busy traffic, plantings of bayberry, viburnum and beach plum provide a tranquil transportation experience.

### New Recreation Opportunities at Floyd Bennett Field

Creation of appropriate recreational opportunities on Floyd Bennett Field has been a primary objective of both the public and the NPS since the park was established in the 1970's. The opening of the *Aviator Sports and Recreation* concession establishes one of the finest athletic facilities in New York City. The new sports center incorporates two ice skating rinks, a gymnastics facility, basketball courts, a rock climbing wall, a fitness center and an outdoor playing field for football and soccer.



## New Wildlife Refuge Visitor Contact Station Leads the Way in Conservation



On August 28, the first visitor walked through the doors of the newly renovated Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge visitor contact station. What he found was a completely remodeled building, expanded from its original 6,400 square feet, to more than 10,400. The first LEEDs (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) rated building for the National Park Service in the northeast, every aspect of its construction and maintenance has been carefully considered for cost efficiency and environmental conservation. Floors constructed of renewable cork and bamboo reflect the sun as it filters through solar shades. The shades are carefully angled to permit radiant heating during the winter months, but block the heat during the summer. Window panels reflect the sun to light the building passively. Even the concrete below the station holds coils of embedded piping to heat and cool the building through geothermal technology. A redesigned interpretive experience through new exhibits will be ready in 2007.

## CPR/AED Training



Photo courtesy Medtronic

This spring over 50 members of the Staten Island Unit staff were trained and certified in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and in the proper use of automated external defibrillators (AED's). While this annual training is normally focused on visitor services staff, the unit made the decision to expand the opportunity to all divisions. A number of AED units are available throughout the unit to respond to cardiac emergencies.

## Staten Island Bikeway Connections



Recreational bicyclists, joggers, walkers and skaters can now move freely between Fort Wadsworth and Miller Field on a newly completed paved greenway. Connections to both Fort Wadsworth and Miller Field were completed this summer under an agreement between the National Park Service and the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation.



## Ferry Service to Sandy Hook

Nearly 8,000 people took advantage of ferry service from Manhattan to Sandy Hook this year, including many first time visitors. Ferries operated on weekends from early June through the end of September. The ferries provided an excellent transportation alternative to Manhattan residents who generally do not own automobiles.



## GOAL 3: UPDATE AND REVITALIZE INTERPRETIVE AND EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

### Revitalized Camping Program



The Ecology Village camping program at Floyd Bennett Field was a flagship program when it was first developed in the late 1970s and continues today as the only curriculum-based overnight school camping program in New York City. Students spend the night on platform tents, cook meals

on a shepherd's stove, gather around a campfire and learn lessons about themselves and their environment through ranger-led programs, teacher involvement and their own cooperative efforts.

This past year, the Northeast Center for Education Services funded work to refine the camping program. Using this support, park staff and members of the National Parks of New York Harbor Education Center worked with experienced NYC camping teachers to develop the new program. Geared for middle school audiences the new experience is infused with inquiry-based activities, and is closely aligned with new NYC learning standards.

### Opening of New Exhibit Gallery at the Ryan Visitor Center



In conjunction with the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Floyd Bennett Field, a collaborative effort from Headquarters, Jamaica Bay and Sandy Hook Unit staff designed and rehabilitated a large, unused space to create the *Rudy Arnold Interpretive Gallery* inside the control tower wing of the Ryan Visitor Center. The gallery, which opened to the public during the week-long celebration, includes important artifacts from the park museum collection and exhibit panels that detail the rich history of the field, from the civilian aviation period through the Naval Air Station era.

### Mont Sec House Restoration Completed

The park has been working with the Harpers Ferry Center for several years on the interior restoration and furnishing of a 19<sup>th</sup> Century house on Mont Sec Avenue in Fort Wadsworth. The work was completed at the end of February and “Mont Sec House” is now open to the public. Plans are underway to completely incorporate the house into the park’s education and interpretive programming, providing visitors with an impressive experience as they tour a century-old Army officer’s home.



### New Sandy Hook Lighthouse Keepers Quarters Exhibits

“Lighthouses of New Jersey” is the new permanent exhibit which opened in the newly rehabilitated Keepers Quarters. The exhibit features all the New Jersey lighthouses along the Jersey Shore as well as those in New York Harbor and Delaware Bay. Interactive dioramas of the harbor and bay illustrate navigating through these waterways both today and in the past. The exhibits were designed jointly by park staff and the New Jersey Lighthouse Society, with funding by the NJ Lighthouse Society; fabrication was funded by the Sandy Hook Foundation.



## NPNH Education Center



The National Parks of New York Harbor Education Center has continued to expand and provide quality education services and professional development opportunities for educators, students, college faculty and NPS staff. Over the 2005/2006 school year, the Center's staff

delivered programs to 2,200 students, presented overviews of the Education Center to 500 principals, assistant principals, science and social studies specialists visiting the Center, presented training for approximately 200 teachers and NPS staff, and conducted outreach at education events for 4,000 educators and students.

To nurture a workforce ready to meet the needs of today's learners, the NPNH Education Center provided a series of professional development workshops throughout the year including:

*NARA*—An orientation to the staff and resources of the National Archives and Records Administration;

*Sustainability Workshop*—two days of provocative presentations, discussions and exercises on 'systems thinking' presented by the president of the Cloud Institute for Sustainability Education;

*Civic Engagement Workshop*—a facilitated, open discussion among superintendents, managers and field staff from the New York and New Jersey National Parks;

*Education Program Assessment Tool Workshop*—13 parks from the Northeast Region were trained by staff of the Northeast Center for Education Services to conduct formal assessments of their park programs;

*Gulag Teacher Workshop*—50 teachers from New York and New Jersey and NPS staff explored ways to use the Gulag exhibit at Ellis Island and curriculum materials with high school students;

*GLOBE*—training for NPS staff to infuse Gateway's environmental programs in order to meet the schools' needs for strong science education.

## Education Center Student Workshops

Two new workshops were added to the Center's offerings this year. "*To Be Somebody in America*"

for 8<sup>th</sup> grade students is a two-visit workshop that integrates social studies, language arts and drama. Using oral histories from the Ellis Island collection, students consider what it takes to have a successful immigration experience. "*Forts and Physics*" for 8<sup>th</sup> grade focuses on Newton's Laws and the physics of fort technology. Graduate students in Education worked with NPS staff on the 8<sup>th</sup> grade version as a function of the formal partnership between the NPS and the City University of New York – Brooklyn College.



## Education Center Junior Ranger Program

The National Park Foundation, with funding from Ocean Spray Cranberries, Inc. helped the Center create its first Junior Ranger program. The Student Conservation Association Intern funded by this grant spent a 12-week internship designing activities for after-school and summer groups. Through a series of activities children observe, explore and record views of the park using various media, including digital photography, aerial photography with kites, and landscape art. After pilot testing, the activities will be introduced to other Gateway sites that have compatible resources. This is the first Junior Ranger program to be designed specifically for the ever expanding after-school audience.



## GOAL 4: EXPAND OUR CAPACITY TO CARRY OUT PARK PROGRAMS

### Healthy Parks – Healthy Living



The “Healthy Parks – Healthy Living” program provides Vitality Interpreters to the National Parks through the Student Conservation Association (SCA.) These SCA students work to promote parks as places for healthy recreation and preserving parks for that purpose. The National Park Foundation Proud Partner, Unilever/Lipton Tea, sponsors the program.

This year the Jamaica Bay Unit benefited greatly from the assistance of an SCA Vitality Intern who did much to expand the unit’s ability to provide interpretation and carry out park recreational programming. He assisted with overnight recreational camping programs, youth group and adult sailing programs, conducted weekly “after work” guided bicycle tours, and offered informal interpretation during roving assignments.

### Partnerships Expand Osprey Nesting



Perhaps nothing symbolizes the Jamaica Bay experience like watching an osprey dive for fish in a thriving Jamaica Bay. Once scarce throughout the Northeast due to habitat loss and pollution, these fish hawks are common again and can be seen nesting throughout Jamaica Bay. The park and its active partners, the New York City Department

of Environmental Protection and the American Littoral Society, band these birds to study their movements and general health, information that is useful in understanding the overall condition of Jamaica Bay. In 2006, 18 young osprey were banded in Jamaica Bay, with many of their nests visible from the newly completed Rockaway Gateway Greenway.

This summer marked the first time an Osprey platform successfully fledged young at Great Kills Park in Staten Island. A forty foot platform was installed in 1995 at Crooke’s Point with the installation assistance of the local utility, Con Edison, and the financial support of New York City Audubon. Con Edison again assisted the park in 2002 by making needed improvements to the platform, including the addition of new nesting material and a perch. Partial successes over the next three years included a young pair building a nest but laying no eggs, and later a pair incubating eggs that never hatched. However, in August 2006, three osprey chicks took first flight from the platform.

### Partnership with Wal-Mart and the National Park Foundation



This past spring the Breezy Point District participated in the *National Parks America Tour* program. Sponsored by the National Park Foundation and Wal-Mart, volunteers and employees from a local Wal-Mart store participated in beach clean-up efforts, prepared a walkway for beach access by

wheelchairs, removed graffiti and helped to prepare Jacob Riis Park for the summer season. The park also received a donation from Wal-Mart that was used to purchase a beach certified wheelchair.

### Expanded Use of our Friends Group



The Friends of Gateway (FOG) has worked with the park on several projects to enhance the visitor experience at Floyd Bennett Field. This effort included educational programs for 5,000 students at the greenhouse, and enhancement of a fishing area through the assistance of a Kaplan Foundation grant secured by FOG. Their volunteers also continued a multi-year program of growing plantings that will be used at the Pennsylvania and Fountain Avenue Landfill rehabilitations.

## HARP



As we celebrate Floyd Bennett Field's rich aviation heritage, 2006 was a productive and rewarding year for the Historic Aircraft Restoration Project (HARP.) This dedicated group of volunteers continued to restore several vintage aircraft for interpretation and display while conducting countless tours of the aircraft collection, drawing many times on their own military experience in aviation. Their assistance was vital to the Floyd Bennett Field 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration, which included the replication and placement of the historic municipal airport entrance sign, and the building of a scale model of the Wright Flyer fuselage.



## Rehabilitation of Nike Missile Radar Site

Work on stabilizing and opening more of the Sandy Hook Nike missile radar site to park visitors continued through the year thanks to ongoing efforts by park staff and volunteers. This year, Navy SeaBees from nearby Naval Weapons Station Earle became the latest group of volunteers to help with the effort. The goal is to open the entire 10 acre site to visitors and interpret Sandy Hook's role in defense of New York Harbor during the Cold War.



## GOAL 5: IMPROVE OUR IMAGE AND IDENTITY AS PART OF THE NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM

### Wildland Fires and Public Education Outreach



In March two large wildfires at Great Kills Park burned 70 acres of Phragmites, advancing quickly due to a heavy fuel load and red flag weather conditions. The fires spread beyond the park to the adjacent community resulting in the evacuation of several homes, although there was no significant property damage or injuries.

To better prepare for future fire seasons the park worked with the New York City Fire Department and several other agencies to improve communications and to do proactive planning. Additionally, the park initiated a fire education program directed at neighboring communities.



With the cooperation of the Staten Island Borough President's Office, rangers conducted an outreach effort to educate homeowners on techniques to protect property from brush fires. Park staff utilized a number of venues including festivals, fairs, community board meetings and door-to-door visits to educate residents about techniques for creating "defensible spaces" around homes.

### Five Boro Bike Tour



The 29<sup>th</sup> annual Five Boro Bike tour of New York City took place this spring. Over 30,000 cyclists rode 42 miles through the city's five boroughs, ending at Fort Wadsworth where riders were treated to music, food and NPS information. The park continues to work with

event organizers to enhance the public's understanding of the role of the National Park Service in New York City and beyond.

### Aviator Sports and Recreation Co-Generation Plant

In addition to new recreational opportunities, the Aviator Sports and Recreation complex builds an interesting link between adaptive use of historic structures and innovative solutions for energy needs. The primary power source for the center is ten natural gas micro turbines that supply the electrical needs for the two ice rinks, the indoor field house, the gymnastics center and a full service food facility. The use of green technologies such as micro turbines provides forward-looking solutions to the environmental challenges faced by urban parks.



## Healthy Parks/Healthy Living Initiative

The park worked closely with both the New York City Road Runners to help publicize exercise opportunities within National Park sites. Using a rack card that describes running opportunities in the National Park System, a card funded and produced through the support of National Park Foundation Proud Partner Unilever/Lipton Tea, park staff greeted runners from throughout America at the pre-race Marathon Health Expo.



## New York City Marathon



November 6<sup>th</sup> dawned bright and warm as 38,000 runners prepared to start the NYC Marathon at Fort Wadsworth. The park was alive with music, television cameras and pre-race activities as rangers and U.S. Park Police staff assisted event organizers with the start of New York

City's largest athletic event. Park staff conducted television and radio interviews with various media outlets and worked with the New York Road Runners Club to increase awareness of the NPS presence with both participants and the television audience.



## Adaptive Water Sports Festival



The Wounded Warrior Project works to provide programs and services designed to ease the burdens of those wounded in military service, to aid in the recovery process, and to smooth their transition back to civilian life. One aspect of this is to provide recreational

programs such as the *Adaptive Water Sports Festival*. This festival has been held for the last two years on the shores of Gateway's Breezy Point, where community volunteers work with disabled military personnel to teach them how to adapt to and enjoy active water sports.

# Looking Ahead

Changes are coming—faster, broader and deeper than at any time in the history of the park. No program will be untouched; no aspect of the park unaffected. We must make room for innovation and improvement. We can't exactly know what the end results will look like, but managing change will dominate much of our work over the next five years.

Many factors are driving this situation. A few of the more notable conditions include:

- a relatively flat operational budget
- increased funding for care of high priority park assets
- accelerated implementation of information technology
- larger numbers of new immigrants in the metro area
- greater opportunities for leasing of excess park facilities
- opportunities for development of new visitor services
- better appreciation for our historical resources
- better understanding of threats to natural resources
- multi-park collaboration and resource sharing
- interest in using Gateway NRA as a model park for the 21st century

In an ideal world, each of these concerns have been explored and considered as part of a comprehensive plan. Unfortunately, revision of the park General Management Plan is not scheduled to occur for several years. Decisions about many critical issues will not be able to wait; they will have to be part of an on-going planning process.

Guidance will come from a number of sources. Decisions must be consistent with the mission of the National Park Service and applicable laws, policies and regulations. In addition, the park has its own enabling legislation, commitments for stewardship of the important natural and cultural resources entrusted to our care, precedents for the types of opportunities that we offer to visitors, and a growing number of plans, studies and reports.



Most important, Gateway NRA is operated by a dedicated staff, actively supported by a wide range of agencies and organizations, and committed to representing the National Park Service within the country's largest urban complex. Working together, we will use each challenge to clarify our purpose, improve visitor opportunities, and strengthen protection of park resources.

Working together, we will continue, "Building a Tradition of Excellence."

*Billy G. Garrett*  
Deputy General Superintendent

## *Service to Our Visitors*

The visitation of Gateway National Recreation Area reached almost 10 million during 2006, making it the 4th most visited park in the National Park System. Our visitors experienced and enjoyed our resources in a variety of ways including:

Swimming, sailing, surfing and fishing; learning about ecosystems and their relationships with city life; restoration of historic aircraft and touring historic fortifications; gardening, photography and poetry readings; plays, folk singing, kite flying and multi-cultural festivals; cricket, tennis and soccer matches; star gazing, bird watching, beach clean-ups and nature talks; archery, camping, cycling and...sunset walks.



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